

The Chronicle and Index

OF THE UNITARIAN SOCIETY.

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[For Gratuitous Circulation.

THE Rev. J. C. Street will be glad to receive contributions in aid of the gratuitous publication of the *Chronicle and Index*.

ANY one desirous of having for distribution tracts, bearing on the various phases of Unitarianism, may have them on applying to Rev. J. C. Street, 16 Queen's Arcade, Belfast.

OUR note of last month, which stated that the meeting house at Limavady was closed, was an error. A letter has been sent to us, addressed to Rev. J. C. Street, from the Rev. Joseph A. Newell, which says:—"Limavady Church is not closed. My last sermon on Sunday week (the letter is dated July 3rd) was attended by over 70 individuals." A more complete correction of an error could not be made, and we are sorry that by misadventure we made so great a mistake. We are sure that all our readers will be glad to know that instead of being closed, the church at Limavady is so well attended. Long may it be so—and its prosperity be a standing rebuke to us for the error we unwittingly made.

THE Flower Service in the Church of the Second Congregation, Belfast, was held on Sunday afternoon, July 8th, at 4 o'clock. The spacious building was, as usual, most charmingly decorated with flowers. Every part of it glowed with beauty and was fragrantly perfumed. For days beforehand many hands had been busy, and on Saturday great numbers of gardens contributed of their sweetest flowers, and numbers of active ladies and gentlemen wrought them into loveliest devices, until the church was illumined with floral beauty. Unfor-

tunately the day was not of the brightest, still there was gathered together a very large congregation both of children and adults. The sight presented to the upturned faces was most beautiful, and was evidently greatly appreciated. The service was entirely conducted by the Rev. J. C. Street. The hymns, stories, and lessons all fitted harmoniously together, and every one felt that a most happy time had been spent in the fine old house of prayer. After the service, many persons lingered about to enjoy the sight of the flowers. On Monday, the best of the flowers were sent to the hospital, to gladden the eyes of the patients there. So the flowers had a beautiful mission to the end of their existence.

AFTER a long and animated discussion the trustees of Manchester New College, by a majority, have decided upon the important step of removing the College to Oxford. There was a large and influential minority in favour of retaining the College in London; but no doubt they will now loyally co-operate with the majority in giving effect to the decision which has been arrived at. That decision is a most momentous one. Everything will now depend upon the heartiness and generosity of the friends of the College whether its future shall prove a success or a failure. For our own part we earnestly hope that every friend of freedom will do his part in securing that our College shall have a fair start in the new career it is entering upon, and that it will long continue to furnish to our few churches a succession of accomplished scholars and faithful ministers of the good tidings of God.

THE Floral Service at Mountpottinger this year was held on Sunday, July 22nd, and was a thorough success. The church, which was beautifully enriched with flowers, was crowded to the doors, and the former minister, the Rev. J. J. Wright, of Bolton, who conducted the service, gave great pleasure to all who were gathered together. He was in one of his happiest moods, and kept the attention of his crowded audience to the end of the service. The hymns and responses were the same as used last year, but they were so good that no one felt disappointed at want of variety. Everything passed off well, and a good collection was made towards defraying the expenses of the scholars' excursion.

THE PULPIT AND THE STAGE.

A LECTURE BY MR. WYBERT REEVE.

Mr. Wybert Reeve delivered his lecture on "The Pulpit and the Stage" in the Unitarian Christian Church, Adelaide, South Australia, on Sunday evening, June 10th. At a quarter past six—three-quarters of an hour before the service was to begin—the church was crowded, standing-room was not obtainable, and crowds had to be turned away. Mr. Reeve stated that when Prince Albert, in opening the great hall in Leeds in 1858 was asking about the progress and culture of the place, he enquired, "Have you a theatre?" He was answered in the negative. "That is a pity," he replied. "You should have one. Nothing is more calculated to promote culture and to raise the tone of the people." In taking the higher view of the drama, Mr. Reeve quoted from the poet Campbell and addresses by Dr. Fraser, the late Bishop of Manchester, Mr. Gladstone, the Rev. H. R. Haweis, Martin Luther, and Sydney Smith, and in opposition to their views that of Mr. Spurgeon. He contrasted the good and evil to be found in the Bible, the rise and progress of the drama, and the manner in which we could trace history, laws, and passions by it. He affirmed that the evil of the modern plays rested to a great extent with the public, and it was for them to assist in reforming it. He drew a comparison of the stage and the pulpit of the present day. How

many earnest men in the pulpit found it absolutely necessary to keep up the interest of the congregation by sensational headings to their sermons. After referring to Mr. Joseph Cook, who attracted large congregations in Australia while giving out his belief in eternal torments prepared for the wicked, Mr. Reeve pointed to the actor and poet, William Shakspeare, and quoted the speech on mercy from the "Merchant of Venice." After reciting from a speech by Professor Blackie to the students of the University of Edinburgh, he mentioned the motives which should induce people to visit the theatre, what should guide their judgment, and the assistance which the Press should give. Better days might be hoped for the stage when people learnt that brain power was more to be valued than muscular force, and more conducive to the country's peace and prosperity. He then took a general view of the morality and importance of the stage and the charity of its members. The reason why actors did not attend church more frequently was that they, like other people, did not care to be preached to by an intelligence that could not or would not touch them, and with a capacity for reading and speaking inferior to their own. He then quoted Carlyle on a visit, and reflections on going to a church, and George Eliot on hearing a celebrated London preacher. Mr. Henry Ward Beecher said, "People go to church to get nothing but straw threshed 500 years ago, and are dissatisfied and will not come again. Well, I honour them for it. If a man sleeps under my preaching, I do not send a boy to wake him up, but I feel somebody had better come and wake me up." He then spoke of the incapacity of many young men who took holy orders, and how their fitness for the task was the last thing thought of, and enforced this by saying, "I can think of no more higher or nobler position than that of an earnest popular pulpit orator. I can think of no more morally degraded or reprehensible one than that of an indifferent, careless, incapacitated preacher, who has not the earnestness to be eloquent, the sense to feel his responsibility, or the soul to win sympathy."

After speaking of the qualities required in a great orator, and instancing such men as the Bishop of Peterborough, Bishop Alexander, Canon Liddon, and other great preachers, he quoted from Milton and Washington Irving, and contrasted the beauties of the Bible and of Shakspeare. He concluded by saying, "As on looking at the glowing picture instinct with poetry and life from a masterhand, or on the sculptured marble, perfect in beauty, grace, and form, so the eloquence of the pulpit or the life scenes of the stage may bring even to the meanest a fellowship of silent and sweet communion with Nature 'which makes the whole world kin.' As greater liberty and generosity of thought increases, may this great heart sympathy of the world progress, for 'I doubt not through the ages one increasing purpose runs, and the thoughts of men are widened with the process of the suns.'" Throughout the lecture was listened to with great attention. It was announced that owing to the numbers that were unable to gain admission Mr. Reeve would repeat the lecture next Sunday evening.

HOW I LEFT ORTHODOXY.

BY JAMES C. STREET.

"LIGHT THROWN ON THE PAST. ITS UPRISING
TOWARDS GOD."

No. 8.—*Continued.*

To establish a position like this would require the most perfect, the most ample, and the most convincing evidence. Where could this be found? It was only playing with the question to cite some musty creed, or to quote the authority of Augustine, or Calvin, or even of Paul and Moses. None of these things would do. If nothing better could be said or done, the doctrine must be dealt with as a mere assumption, without any warrant of evidence to justify its existence. The closer I looked into history the more clearly I saw that the living world of man was like a living tree growing with steady growth, and striving upwards towards perfection. The record was one of development and not of degradation. Man was rising, not falling. The past was the childhood of the world. It had grown as

the babe grows—little by little, and step by step, and its course was still towards manhood. This seemed to me to be the story of history, and it was in keeping with all that I had learned in all the other directions in which I had sought for guidance.

When I had reached this stage of my growth, the great studies of Darwin, and the teachings of Spencer and Huxley, came into prominence, and suggested new inquiries as well as opened out new truths.

These men led their compeers into regions of thought that to many proved not only bewildering but dismaying. Tracing up the life of man, instead of reaching the perfect man as the fount and origin, they came upon ever lower forms of life, until some primal germs were reached. The relationship of man with the lower animals was not only affirmed but apparently established. Starting from the men and women of to-day, these students of science traced man up along the paths of history until man disappeared, and his identity was lost in another order of animals; and then pressing upward along the track, they passed from one form of life to another, until they reached the protoplasm. Beyond this they could not go, though they were conscious that no limits could be put to discovery, and that beyond their protoplasm might be germs incomprehensible and innumerable, endowed with potency and energy, which could develop with untiring continuity. Starting upon this primeval germ of life, wherever it was, and however it was called into existence, another band of thinkers traced the course of life along its wondrous stream, down from the still, cold heights, trickling, gurgling, falling, rushing, lingering, spreading, deepening, until the protoplasm had grown into man, and then they traced him from infancy, childhood, and puberty into vigorous manhood. They saw in life itself a potentiality which was sufficient to explain all the varied phenomena of life on the globe, and which yet had before it possibilities beyond the power of the human intellect to grasp.

So these teachers were wide as the poles asunder from the doctrine of man's original perfection and subsequent fall; all their studies

and discoveries pointed in an entirely opposite direction. To them it was clear that there was no such thing as a fall, for man had never stood at any lofty height; as they went backwards they found him feebler in power and nature, more ignorant of the world and its laws, living amid darker superstitions, and practising ever greater barbarities, until the man was lost in the brute.

Every line of evidence I followed pointed me away from the old doctrine, and brought into prominence one of another order and a higher nature.

To see man on the pedestal of holiness, and in the plenitude of power and grace, and then suddenly, like a star hurled from heaven, cast down into a bestial degradation, and his whole race blasted and ruined, was not simply a startling but an actually inconceivable spectacle. It involved such degrading thoughts of God, it dwarfed his power, limited his wisdom, and curtailed His love in such a degree that in any true and worthy sense God Himself disappeared; and the machinery called into existence to remedy the great wrong, and repair the awful disaster, was so cumbrous, mechanical, and imperfect that, on examination, it proved to be no work of God, but the bungling, clumsy contrivance of man, unfit for its work, and unworthy of its aim.

Thus stood the actual conditions of things. God created man perfect, and meant him to continue so and be happy; but man was perverse and the Devil was beguiling, so that the perfect man fell, and in that fall involved the fall of all the unborn generations of mankind who should spring from his loins. But God resolved to begin His work again, and devised a scheme by which His own law should be vindicated, His justice satisfied, and at the same time His work completed. He, in the person of His Son, would die a shameful death. The innocent blood should atone for the guilty, the suffering which sin entailed should be borne by one who did not sin, and so justice should be satisfied, and the sinner should be saved. This scheme, elaborate as it was, and intended to secure the safety of all, was, notwithstanding that God was its author, to break down with miserable failure; for after

all, only a portion would be saved, and the rest would have to suffer just as much as if God had not died for them. All this contrivance was intended to meet the necessity created by the fall of man. What became of it all if there was no fall? What was the need of this dying God, this atonement for sins, this substitution of an innocent sufferer for guilty transgressors if, after all, there never had been such a catastrophe, and man had not crashed down from his high estate in the depths of ruin?

Clearly all these dogmas would have to follow the original error into the limbo of blunders, and pass away from the human mind for ever. I felt the old dogma crash down in its place in my mind as Dagon fell in his temple. I had no choice in the matter. Reason was convinced. Evidence proved irresistible. The dogma disappeared, as its attendant dogmas had disappeared long before.

What was it that now met my gaze? The past had hitherto been an insoluble problem to me. The story of man's downfall hung heavily upon me, it all seemed sad and terrible, but, alas! too true. Now all this had gone, and I looked back through the long vistas of time until man himself disappeared, and the world was occupied with inferior animals; and still further down God's wondrous avenues until all animal life was lost; and away, away into the infinite past until only a germ life could be seen, the seed, the egg, the essence of all that yet should be. And as I gazed I caught a glimpse of one great law of God—quietly, ceaselessly, irresistibly working—working to carry out His will, to accomplish that whereunto He had fitted it, and that law was this: God had spoken His word of life, and had commanded it to go on for ever—untiring through germs, and cells, and organism, through plants, and animals, until man appeared, and then to work in Him to accomplish His perfection. Instead of a vast and appalling ruin, standing amid the wastes of desolation, and haunted by lofty traditions and memoirs, I saw an orderly and unceasing growth, a great purpose ever working, and a gradual uprising from the lower to the higher. The noises and activities around me no longer told of a spirit of evil at work, tearing down,

destroying, and blasting all things, fair and beautiful; but of beneficent and creative energies in operation, working together for a great good, and lifting up the whole race of man. The throes, and struggles, and sorrows with which creation groaned were no more to me proofs of a malicious spirit working for man's ruin, but the mighty agencies of heaven struggling in and with man to lift him nearer to God. Evil was no longer a sign of the fall of man from some prior state of perfect holiness, but an evidence of his effort at development, and his struggle for spiritual freedom.

As I traced the course of history, I found I had been misreading all its lessons; reading the *past* into the future, and the *future* into the past. What had seemed to me hitherto the reality was this—that, in ages long since passed, God out of His creative energy had called man into existence, made like Himself,

“Godlike erect, in native honour clad,”

and equipped with all the graces and endowments which qualified him to rank with the sons of God, who “in circles lovelier than the rainbow,” served in gladness around the Eternal Throne; and that, by an unhappy fate, he had been hurled down from his high estate into a deep and fearful ruin, cast out of the kingdom of heaven, swept from the pure regions of holiness into the awful deeps of utter depravity, and thrown “as rubbish to the void.” The catastrophe was complete, overwhelming, and appalling. At the sight of it angels shuddered, and God Himself was aghast. From that moment new agencies were called into existence to deal with this unlooked for tragedy, and efforts were made to save something from the wreck, that the stamp of absolute and eternal failure might not be found upon all this work of God. Religion sprang into existence, and all the agencies for salvation were sent forth on their errands of rescue. But as the ages swept along these agencies were baffled, foiled, and vanquished. They were only life-boats in which a few could be saved; every day saw myriads, with awful groans, sucked down into the vortex of fate, every shore was strewn with shipwrecks, every home was blighted with ruin,

the earth was an awful chamber of groans and sorrow, and eternity, like a great earthquake gulping a city in its tremendous maw, smacked its mumbling lips as the millions of God-created men were swallowed up in its devouring horrors. The whole human world was a failure, life was a misery, history was a story of degradation, religion was a poor and ineffectual remedy, God Himself was baffled and defeated, and man was the woe-begone spirit of the universe, filling its landscape with groans and sighs and tears, and shuddering down into hopeless misery.

I thank God that I had now discovered that all this was a ghastly dream, a horrid nightmare of the fancy, and that it utterly misrepresented the facts of the universe and the relations of God. I awoke; the night-horror passed away, shadows fled, the daylight dawned, the songs of heaven were heard, the eternal peace was in my soul.

What was the picture, the real true picture, which now painted itself in indelible and dazzling colours in my very soul? It was this:

I saw the Eternal in the far off distant ages of the Past, ere worlds or stars were created, breathing His fiat of life, energy, and power into the universe, and sending it forth on its wonderful and all-conquering way. On it went forth, obedient to His will, and endowed with His sublime commission. Forms of life, invisible save to the Eternal, but charged with everlasting purposes, sprang into being, passed on, bequeathing their energies with added powers to successors who came forth from them; they, in their turn, in successive ages, as worlds were formed, and stars swung into their places, and space was studded with glittering constellations, succeeded by others, until at last, in orderly development, there was born man, a living soul, the child and successor of those primary forces that God had created, having within himself the stored up forces of all past ages, and the power and potency of ages yet to be. But a child untaught, untrained, with only the instincts bequeathed by an ancestry that had disappeared, and a groping energy that was ever

putting forth feelers into the world around, and grasping whatever lay within its reach, struggling out of the past, reaching towards the future, losing one thing after another when it had served its purpose, and gaining others suited to its condition; gradually seeing with clearer vision, understanding with greater accuracy, and growing into greater strength. At length Divine reason dawned, conscience struggled into existence, and the life of man rose into a higher region. There were teachers, helpers, guides all along the road, and the energy of God, with its original commission, grew mightily within. Struggle, effort, groaning, sorrows, trial, sin, misery, marked the road. But meanwhile there was a gradual rising. Humanity was like a great ocean. I had sometimes stood on a rocky coast, against which Atlantic waves were sweeping. The tide was low, and I could saunter among its caves and chasms, and see the forms of life which were to be found in its deep recesses. But as I stood or sauntered, I felt the gradual lapping at my feet of the incoming waves, and I thought of what was taking place. I knew that far away across the globe, the waters were gradually sweeping my way; that from distant inlets, lakes, and rivers, from mountain springs and busy harbours, the waters were moving away, and that gradually they were sweeping into the mighty ocean, and that it was rising, swelling, and moving with resistless majesty towards the spot where I was standing. Winds swept over these waters, and they were beaten into billows, and tempests; but no winds stopped their onward sweep. In calm or storm, 'mid darkness or light, the tide rose and rolled, and gradually I had to shift my place; the waters covered the rocks and rose up to the cliffs, the ocean rose higher and higher, still swelling, tossing, and throbbing with its great onward energy. What a lesson this taught me about humanity! Like this mighty ocean was the life of man. From the mountain-spring of life there came forth a Divine fiat, it came on in streams, and rivers, it rolled out into bays and harbours, it swelled into a great sea of life, until the great ocean of humanity was heaving and tossing with its

tremendous energy. In the tossing and throbbing, the struggle and unrest, could be seen the force that was resistlessly sweeping on. Man was slowly but steadily rising. Out of darkness he was going forth into light, out of barbarism into culture, out of savagery into civilization, out of sin into holiness, out of death into life. The throne of God was like the mountain cliff, confronting the waves of the sea, and the tides of human life were gradually climbing up towards the face of Him who sat thereon. As the sea swelled and tossed, it seemed to those who were buffeting and struggling in its waters as if all was conflict and turmoil; the energy and power were felt, and there was a fascination in the tireless activity; but to Him who was on the throne it could be seen that the waters were rising, that its waves rose higher up the steps of the throne, and that man was ever coming nearer to God. So from age to age I saw the tireless sweep of human life—ever onward, ever upwards, rising into culture, hope, piety, godlikeness. The ages climbed ever one above another. Growth was the order of the world. Time was working for eternity. Darkness was passing into light.

This was the great spectacle.

Light was thrown on the past, and its story was shown in its continual "uprising towards God."

"DIVINE LIGHT FOR EVER. INCREASING HAPPINESS,
AND ENDLESS GROWTH."

No. 9.

"And there shall be no night there; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun; for the Lord God giveth them light: and they shall reign for ever and ever."

Rev. xxii. 5.

Those of you who have followed me, as I have set forth the story of my mental and spiritual life, will have noticed how completely and fundamentally my position has changed, and into what a new world of thought and hope my pilgrimage has brought me. I am out of the prison-house, and on the broad uplands of freedom, where I can breathe freely and find fitting exercise for every faculty with which God has endowed

me. My fears and doubts have disappeared, as the mists which cloud the faces of mountains disappear before the glowing warmth of the mid-day sun. Traditions and superstitions which once laid their firm grip upon me and held me in their masterful clutch have withdrawn their baleful influence from my life, and I am left unimpeded to go forward in any direction that the light of God may guide me. If it had not been that my emergence from darkness had been gradual and slow, the excessive light would, I think, have blinded me. But it was not until my nature had rejoiced in the gleam of one ray of God's guiding spirit, and grown familiar with its light and the glory it displayed, that another was revealed. The stars, one by one, burst out upon my midnight gloom, gradually irradiating the heavens and shedding their faint and softening beams upon my spiritual world; then the moon, walking in brightness, came forth into the smiling heavens, dimming the stars by her lustre, and enabling me to see my pathway in a clearer light; and then faintly arose the morning sun, sending his lightning gleams and glowing streamers in advance to herald his approach, and when all was ready for his reception he sprang forth smiling into the heavens, lighting up mountain and vale, rivulet and ocean, earth and heaven, with his matchless glory. So was it with me in the way which light came to me: not in one sudden outburst of light—dazzling and startling by its tremendous contrast,—but gradually, softly, and with ever growing brilliance, until the mid-day spiritual glories were all about me, and the day, with all its charms, invited me to ways of pleasantness and to paths of peace.

I had now utterly broken with the past: my connection with the popular beliefs had gradually been severed, and I was living in a new world of hopes and aspirations. All fear of hell, and hell itself, had disappeared; the oppressive fatalism of Calvinism, with its doctrines of Election and Reprobation, had fled from me; the authority of priests, churches, books, and creeds had ceased to dominate my mind; miracle had given place to law; God, instead of being an awful object of dread, had

grown to be attractive and resistless force of love; all men were His children, and equally the objects of His all-embracing love; castes and favourites had ceased to be, and the past, instead of being the story of an awful and universal tragedy of ruin, was seen to be a theatre of endless and continuous growth, gradually rising out of imperfection, straining towards the light, and surging ever nearer towards the throne of God. The familiar features of the old so-called orthodox theology had utterly disappeared, and in place of them a religious life and hope, lustrous with holiness, instinct with god-like energy, and filled with the prophecy and promise of infinite light, growing joy, and boundless progress had taken possession of my soul. I had lived on the arid wastes, amid discordant horrors, and was now in the summer regions of the soul, where the music of Divine joy was for ever making the world tremulous with its harmonies.

It is not difficult to see that a mental pilgrimage like mine could not be made without causing me trouble, anxiety, loss of friends, isolation, and sorrow. Any one who has separated himself from old associations and connections, and, for conscience' sake, broken away from the religious or political world in which he was born and nurtured, will appreciate in some degree the struggles through which I have passed, and the loneliness with which I have oftentimes been oppressed. We have always to struggle into life. There must be birth throes, and often the tribulation continues for a painfully protracted period. But the life thus entered upon, and the new sensations and hopes it brings, are more than a compensation for all that has had to be borne. The escape from fears, and the victory over doubts, resulting in trust and confidence, are a sufficient reward for all that has ever to be endured.

(To be continued).

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